

MEETING MINUTES

Finance Committee

3rd Floor Selectmen's Conference Room

January 14, 2009

CALL TO ORDER

Time – 7:15 P.M.

Members in attendance: Chairman Joanne F. Marden, Tim Felter, Mary O'Donoghue, S. Jon Stumpf, Cindy Milne, Richard T. Howe, Mark Merritt, Paul Fortier and Stephen Stapinski. Also present: Town Manager Reginald "Buzz" Stapczynski, School Superintendent Dr. Claudia Bach and Director of Pupil Personnel, Dr. Katherine Fink.

MEETING MINUTES

The Tri-Board minutes of December 1, 2008 were moved and seconded for approval. The motion passed unanimously. 9-0

The Finance Committee minutes of December 10, 2008 were moved and seconded for approval. The motion was amended to include the attachment of eight documents to the minutes for submission onto the Finance Committee website. The motion passed unanimously. 9-0

SPECIAL EDUCATION PRESENTATION

Dr. Katherine Fink, Director of Pupil Personnel, gave a presentation on Special Education to Finance Committee members. Her presentation included budget challenges as well as actions the School Department is presently taking in order to contain Special Education costs. Ms. Marden said that the purpose of this presentation was to educate the Finance Committee to better understand Special Education issues in order to make better informed decisions while preparing the FY2010 budget. Some of the challenges discussed included:

- Title VI ineligibility due to the number of students
- Unavailability of Federal stimulus aid for SPED costs
- Large SPED deficit this year
- Expected reduction in Circuit Breaker reimbursement rate
- Expense of educating 61 autistic students
- Elimination of \$20,000 next year to the 274 Grant Program for students with autism
- Possible elimination of Medicaid reimbursement for administrative claims

There was some discussion on Out-Of-District tuitions including the continuous approval of tuition hikes by the Operational Services Division. Committee members asked Dr. Fink if the State could justify these significant tuition increases. Dr. Fink and Dr. Bach both agreed that if towns are being asked to cut costs, the OSD should as well. Dr. Bach added that the State could and should institute SPED cost freezes. All agreed more lobbying to State and Federal legislators to this effort is needed.

Discussion regarding the high cost of residential placements followed. Dr. Fink informed Committee members that an unusually high number of students moved to residential programs in FY2009. Committee members asked Dr. Fink who decides the best program for students. She replied that it is a team effort. Dr. Fink added that future costs are difficult to predict due to many variables. One such variable discussed was unilateral placement. This practice was noted to

significantly impact the Town budget. In response to questions put forth by Committee members, Dr. Fink informed them that currently, there are 5 or 6 active legal cases involving a significant dollar amount adding that they are possible future liabilities.

Subsequent to Dr. Fink's presentation, Committee members entered into a lengthy discussion regarding SPED cost increases including how the formula for calculating these costs should be structured. Most believed that the School Department is doing there best in planning for the SPED budget in spite of the lack of funding from State and Federal governments. Mr. Merritt suggested using a different budget model when budgeting for SPED and to find a better method of how recommendations are made for appropriations to Town/School departments. All agreed that FTE's are a major component of the budget process and that future layoffs are inevitable.

FINANCE COMMITTEE WEBSITE

Mr. Merritt reported that the Finance Committee website within the Town's website is progressing well. All agreed that it would be inappropriate to unilaterally decide as a committee what material should be posted on the site but that Town staff must be involved prior to any decision.

Steve Stapinski moved and Mary O'Donoghue seconded to approve the eight documents listed by Mr. Merritt, to be posted on the website attached to the December 10, 2008 minutes. The motion passed unanimously. 9-0

TRANSFER REQUEST

Committee members were asked to approve a transfer request from the Reserve Fund to Other Expenses in the amount of \$16,624.25 for Community Development & Planning for the purpose of covering expenditures through 12/29/08 for temporary secretarial services from an employment agency rather than filling the position with a full time benefitted employee. Following a brief discussion, the motion passed unanimously. 9-0

ADJOURNMENT – 9:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carolyn Lynch
Recording Secretary